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ABSTRACT

Modeling the behaviors they expect students to exhibit is one way teachers can teach comprehension skills. Teachers need to give multiple examples wherein the teacher models every behavior students should exhibit, giving the answer to the question, and giving the line of reasoning followed to arrive at the answer. To teach each separate comprehension skill, the teacher will need to spend approximately 15 minutes per day per group for a total of five weeks. Each day for a week, the teacher should model three to five examples of the desired behavior totalling 15 to 25 repetitions. In the second week, the teacher should perform all behaviors except one in each example, turning over to students responsibility for the one behavior. In succeeding weeks, the teacher can gradually turn over to students all responsibility for independent applications of the comprehension skill. To teach finding the main idea, a teacher can (1) read the story, (2) circle key words in each sentence, (3) read key words aloud, and (4) restate repeated ideas as a sentence or title. Responsibility for behaviors can be turned over to students in reverse order. Parallel procedures can also be followed for teaching inference skills, and skills in detecting mood or tone of a passage, summarizing, and sequencing events. (HTH)

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Modeling: A Direct Instruction Model for Programming Reading Comprehension

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Modeling: A Direct Instruction
Model for Programming Reading Comprehension Skills

"Reading comprehension is a process of making sense of written ideas through meaningful interpretation and interaction with language" (Heilman, Blair, and Rupley, 1981, p. 242). The word "process" is the key to this definition of reading comprehension. Since this process happens in the brain, the resultant behavior change is the only available measure of reading comprehension.

Research efforts of the past sixty years have assumed that comprehension is a multifaceted process involving a number of separate skills. McCanne (1963) may be representative of reading experts who have listed the skills comprising reading comprehension. His list includes the following: 1) classifying things; 2) classifying things and ideas; 3) recognizing wholes and parts; 4) finding details to support main ideas; 5) recalling information for objectives; 6) suggesting a title for a story; 7) deciding on subtitles; 8) finding the main idea of a story; 9) finding the main idea of a paragraph; and 10) finding the major thought units.

Research does not support these separate skills as a part of reading comprehension. In fact, few researchers have been able to isolate significant comprehension skills.

A number of major studies on the reading comprehension process were done by Frederick Davis (1972). He delineated these five comprehension skills: 1) knowledge of word meanings; 2) ability to reason in reading; 3) concentration on literal sense meaning; 4) following the structure of a passage; and 5) recognizing the mood and literary techniques of a

writer.

Spearitt (1972) reanalyzed Davis's data, and found four factors to be significant: 1) recalling word meanings; 2) drawing inferences; 3) following the structure of a passage; and 4) recognizing a writer's purpose, attitude, tone, and mood. Thorndike (1973-74) also reanalyzed Davis's data. He found only two significant factors: 1) word knowledge, and 2) reasoning in reading.

Both experts and researchers agree that vocabulary is an integral part of comprehension. Meaning cannot be derived from what is read if the reader does not understand the definition of and have a concept for the words which are read. Most basal reader teacher's manuals include emphasis on vocabulary. Consequently, most elementary classroom teachers do a good job of teaching vocabulary words.

However, basal reader teacher's manuals do not allow for the teaching of other comprehension skills. Comprehensive questions are posed, answers are elicited, and the lesson proceeds. For example, examine how inferencing is taught. Here is a paragraph that might appear in a basal reader:

"Susan, Mary, and Jill are sisters. They live with their parents on Mill Street. One day their mother took Susan and Jill shopping. They had lunch together after shopping, and then went to a movie."

A question following this story might be: "Which of the girls did not go shopping with her mom?" The story doesn't answer the question directly; it does not say, "Mary did not go shopping with her mom." Inferencing is required to answer the question. The basal reader teacher's manual lists the question to be asked and the correct answer.

In the classroom situation, the teacher will probably call on "Star", the child who can answer the question correctly. She will praise the correct answer, and proceed to the next question, never stopping to explain how the answer was derived.

The same procedure is followed for questions dealing with other comprehension skills: main idea, summarizing, finding topic sentences, sequencing events. The teacher calls on "Star" to answer the question because she knows that "Star" can answer correctly. The teacher does not call on the student who cannot answer the question correctly, because she does not want to take the time to teach the student how to find the correct answer. Consequently, no one learns how to make inferences, find main ideas, or to sequence events. Star already knows how; other students learn nothing.

Many students are able to make the inference (the "ah-ha") for themselves. Many students need to be taught how to make this jump. The basal reader programs do not allow for this teaching. Durkin (1981) analyzed comprehension instruction in basal manuals. She found that comprehension skills such as finding main idea were named in the text, but little or no directions were given for instruction in these skills.

In order to teach these comprehension skills, teachers must use direct instruction. One way to do this is for teachers to model the behaviors they expect students to exhibit. Gordon (1985) discusses what she calls "modeling inference awareness" in order to help students make inferences. She describes this as using "direct explanation." The technique is much like that described here.

Pearson (1985) reported the use of a similar modeling technique with

fourth graders in teaching inferencing. Results showed improved inferencing among students of lower reading comprehension ability. Students with higher reading comprehension scores showed less improvement.

In order to model the behaviors they expect students to exhibit, teachers need to give multiple examples wherein the teacher models every behavior students should exhibit, giving the answer to the question, and giving the line of reasoning followed in determining the answer. The number of examples modeled by the teacher is determined by the number of repetitions needed by the learner in order to learn. For most students, this falls between five and fifteen repetitions. For the gifted learner, one to three repetitions may suffice. For the slow learner, fifteen to twenty-five repetitions may be required.

In order to teach each separate comprehension skill, the teacher will need to spend approximately 15 minutes per day per group for a total of five weeks. Each day for a week, the teacher should model 3 to 5 examples of the desired behavior. This gives 15 to 25 repetitions. The second week, the teacher should perform all behaviors but one in each example, turning over responsibility to students for the one behavior. The third week, the teacher should perform all behaviors but two, turning over to students responsibility for those two behaviors. The fourth week, students should perform all behaviors, under the guidance of the teacher. The fifth week should allow for independent applications of the comprehension skill by the students.

The time table might look like this:

Week 1) Teacher models: Read paragraph. Ask question. Answer question. Reason aloud to show students how answer was found (find clues; give reasoning).

Week 2) Read paragraph. Ask question. Teacher answers question. Students find clues; teacher gives reasoning.

Week 3) Read paragraph. Ask question. Teacher gives answer. Students find clues and give reasoning.

Week 4) Read paragraph. Ask question. Students give answers, find clues, and give reasoning.

Week 5) Independent practice.

Exactly which responsibility is turned over to students first, second, etc. depends upon the skill being taught.

To teach finding the main idea, these steps can be followed: 1) read story; 2) circle key words in each sentence; 3) read key words aloud, listening for repeated idea, then state the repeated idea; 4) restate repeated idea as a sentence or title, whichever is preferred.

Responsibility can be turned over to students in the reverse order: week 2, step 4; week 3, steps 3 and 4; week 4, steps 2, 3, and 4; week 5, independent practice.

An example of a paragraph used to teach main ideas follows:

The ringing of bells during storms was popular for hundreds of years. Many people felt this was a good way to drive away a storm's evil spirits. Still others felt that the sound waves would prevent a bolt of lightning from striking their village. However, those who rang bells in exposed church towers were often the ones who were struck by lightning (Boning, 1970, p. 39).

Repeated idea: Why bells were rung during storms.

Main idea: Why people rang bells during storms.

To teach inferencing, these steps can be followed: 1) read paragraph, ask question; 2) answer question; 3) find clues or evidence; 4) give reasoning.

Responsibility can be turned over to students in the reverse order: week 2, step 4; week 3, steps 3 and 4; week 4, steps 2, 3, and 4; week 5, independent practice.

An example of a paragraph used to teach inferencing follows:

If you were trying to fall asleep, would a dark, quiet room be the best place to go? French scientists have found that a boring situtation brings on sleep better than darkness and silence. In this experiment, people who experienced the monotonous repeating of a sound or light fell asleep more easily than people in quiet darkness. Next time you can't get to sleep, listen to the faucet drip or watch the corner traffic light (Boning, 1982, p. 13).

Question: If you're trying to stay awake, which should you do: watch a slowly blinking light, read an exciting book, listen to a repeated sound, or read a dull book?

Answer: read an exciting book.

Evidence: a boring situation brings on sleep better; people who experienced the monotonous repeating of a sound or light fell asleep more easily.

Reasoning: An exciting book should help to keep one awake, as it is neither boring nor monotonous.

To teach detecting the mood of a passage, these steps can be

followed: 1) read paragraph, ask question about mood author is attempting to establish; 2) state mood of passage; 3) state method used by author to establish mood: character's appearance, dialogue, setting, or specific situation; 4) find evidence or clues to support decision.

Some possible moods: humor, fear, suspense, pleasure, anger, sadness, frustration, embarrassment, uneasiness, anxiety, happiness, sorrow.

Responsibility can be turned over to students in reverse order: week 2, step 4; week 3, steps 3 and 4; week 4, steps 2, 3, and 4; week 5, independent practice.

An example of a paragraph used to teach detecting the mood follows:

The child was at the top of the stairs amid the intense heat. Jim tried to gain a footing on the steps, but each time they crumbled beneath his feet. "There must be another way," he thought just as a draft fanned the staircase into an impenetrable sheet of flames (Sullivan and Tidd, 1981, p. 37).

Mood: frustration, suspense

Method: specific situation

Evidence: stairs crumbled, impenetrable sheet of flames

Directions and examples were given for finding the main idea of a passage, making inferences from given clues, and detecting the mood of a passage. The same basic modeling procedures should be followed in teaching such comprehension skills as summarizing and sequencing events. Reading study skills such as outlining and note-taking should also be taught through modeling, so that students have a thorough understanding of the behaviors which will result in a successful completion of the assigned task. As students reach an understanding of how to accomplish these tasks, comprehension in reading should improve.

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